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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 000008

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TAGS: [ECON](#) [ENRG](#) [EPET](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: PRT TIKRIT: GOVERNOR, DEPUTY GOVERNOR MEET WITH VP  
HASHEMI, KEY MINISTERS

Classified By: PRT Leader Stephanie Miley for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (U) This is a PRT Tikrit, Salah ad Din cable.

12. (C) SUMMARY. The Governor and Deputy Governor of Salah ad Din (SaD) province met with Vice-President Al Hashemi and the Ministers of Oil and the Interior during a trip to Baghdad on December 27-28. As the second in a series of trips (the first was in mid-November) initiated by BG Wiercinski (DCG(S) 25ID) to enhance communication between the GOI and provincial authorities, participants discussed a number of key political, economic, and security issues in the Sunni heartland. Some of these issues include the anticipated aftermath of Saddam's execution, the Sunni image in the West, the severe refined fuel shortages, and methods to improve ISF capabilities in SaD. While the Vice-President and the Ministers hesitated to commit specific resources to requests submitted by the Governor, the meetings may serve as a springboard to promote improved communication and cooperation between provincial authorities and the GOI.

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An Opportunity for Dialogue  
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13. (C) Communication between the political establishment in Salah ad Din, a province located north of Baghdad in the Sunni heartland, and key GOI policymakers is extremely sporadic. On December 27-28, Governor Hamad Hamood Shekti and Deputy Governor General Abdulla Hussein Muhammed of Salah ad Din province traveled to Baghdad to meet with Vice-President Al Hashemi, Oil Minister Shahrastani, and Interior Minister Al Bolani in order to exchange views on a number of important subjects. Accompanied by the PRT Team Leader and a representative from the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division (the unit responsible for Salah ad Din), the Governor and Deputy Governor were able to express their concerns regarding provincial security, the languishing economy, the largely dysfunctional Bayji oil refinery, De-Baathification, and many other issues.

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From One Sunni to Another  
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14. (C) During their December 28 meeting, Vice-President Al Hashemi emphasized to Governor Hamad and General Abdulla that Sunnis are often portrayed as anti-democratic in the Western media; this, he said, must be changed. While concurring that the Shia are largely responsible for the division of the country along sectarian lines, all participants agreed that Salah ad Din could be a shining example of religious harmony. Al Hashemi stressed that positive change should be led by the provinces, not Baghdad. Agreeing with this sentiment, General Abdulla then declared that SaD residents would follow anyone who was a strong and patriotic leader; even a Jewish or Christian person. Abdulla also added that leaders needed to be elected who were not beholden to their tribes. (NOTE:

This is currently a key issue in SaD, as provincial budget execution is currently being held up by a dispute within the provincial council between representatives from Al Alem, including the Deputy Governor, and representatives from Tuz, an area primarily populated by Kurds and Turkomen area of northeastern SaD. END NOTE.)

15. (C) The Governor and Deputy Governor expressed concern about public reaction in SaD to the announcement of Saddam Hussein's pending execution, requesting three days advance notice to ensure that adequate security measures were in place. The Vice-President asked if the provincial leaders had spoken to any GOI representatives about this, and when they answered in the negative, he said he would do what he could. (NOTE: This request was not honored, as Hussein's execution was carried out on the morning of December 30 without any notice and causing much concern for the SaD provincial leadership about the long-term political ramifications and reconciliation efforts. END NOTE.)

16. (C) Both Hamad and Abdulla communicated the need for immediate public works projects in order to generate employment. Abdulla made several suggestions for potential GOI initiatives in SaD, including an oft-heard proposal for the construction of an airport, a new cement factory, and the hiring of two thousand additional Iraqi Police. The attendees also discussed the need to continue to relax (or reform?) current de-Ba'athification strictures, emphasizing the hundreds of still-unemployed SaD teachers who had been forced out of their positions three years ago. On this point, Al Hashemi requested that Hamad or Abdulla provide a list of teachers with which he could follow up to the Commission.

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Oil Talk  
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17. (C) Citing the negative economic effect price increases have upon the population, Hamad urged Minister of Oil Shahrستاني during a meeting on December 27 to ensure future official price increases were more gradual, perhaps only 25 ID per month. Shahrستاني did not commit to any action; only stating that he would look into the matter.

18. (C) Alluding to the rampant corruption at the Bayji oil refinery, they all agreed that stronger leadership was needed in order to "clean up" plant operations. Revealing the Governor and Deputy Governor's high level of interaction (or interference) with the refinery, the participants also discussed specific personnel, including the chief of transportation, Ibrahim Hamadi, ) who was described as "a good man, but a coward" ) and the head of production, Abdul Khader ) who they consider to be "competent." (NOTE: Ibrahim, the former chief of distribution at the refinery, is believed to be incarcerated in Baghdad. He was considered by CF units on the ground to be heavily involved in corruption onsite. He is generally hostile to CF presence, and there have also been unconfirmed reports that he may be an AQIZ sympathizer. END NOTE.) There was disagreement about which qualifications should be considered when hiring key personnel; the Deputy Governor argued that tribal affiliations and other issues should be considered, which the Governor was not in favor of, while Shahrستاني's priority was only "no Baathists."

19. (C) Shahrستاني charged the Governor and Deputy Governor with eliminating the black market for fuel, telling them that the governor has the ability to close any station down, at any time, especially in the case of stations that had been built without proper permits. However, this is unlikely to occur in SaD in the near future; Hamad stated that he would not close any stations, regardless of their status, claiming that it would put someone out of work. (NOTE: The Governor

and Deputy Governor are believed to personally own large numbers of gas stations in SaD. END NOTE.)

¶10. (C) General Abdulla also argued that the Strategic Infrastructure Brigades (SIB) presently tasked with protecting Iraq's critical oil pipelines are not capable of their mission. He requested that Shahrستاني authorize an additional brigade, formed in Salah ad Din, that he said "could be like the old army, tough and strong", and would have the additional benefit of lowering unemployment. Shahrستاني did not seem to favor the idea.

¶11. (C) Oversupply of heavy fuel oil (HFO) ) or "black oil" - was the primary reason the Bayji refinery ceased operations for a few weeks in early December. With this in mind, Hamad and Abdulla argued for two key changes: the opening of a transportation contracting office in Bayji (all contracting of fuel tankers is currently performed in Baghdad) and the distribution of HFO to the provinces. Abdulla pointed out that provincial authorities could find creative uses for the HFO, simultaneously relieving the storage problem at the refinery. Similar to the other recommendations, Shahrستاني refused to commit to any action, only saying that the ideas would be considered.

¶12. (C) Following the meeting with Minister Shahrستاني, the Governor and Deputy Governor had a productive and congenial meeting with the Deputy Ministers of Upstream Production, Distribution, and Refineries. The Minister of Upstream Production mentioned that Salah ad Din under the previous regime had only three economic sectors to generate economic growth: the military, the civil service, and the oil industry. Today, he pointed out, only the oil sector remains ) a statement that his visitors from SaD certainly agreed with.

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Former Foes, Now Friends?  
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¶13. (C) Minister of the Interior Al Bolani (Shia, SCIRI) stated to his visitor from Salah ad Din (only the Governor attended this meeting), the former cradle of Sunni Baathism, that as fellow elected officials they all needed to show the old regime, 'takfiri' elements, and the world that Iraq's problems were not being caused by outside influences (read: Iran). Al Bolani stated that Iraq's leaders needed to solve an entirely Iraqi security problem. Hamad responded by stating that regardless of the origin of the violence, the public was losing its patience with Iraqi government's inability to restore order.

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¶14. (C) Governor Hamad expressed to Al Bolani his concern over the secure transport of Hussein's body after the execution was carried out. Al Bolani agreed that security would be an issue but stated that Hussein "received a fair trial and will receive a fair burial."

¶15. (C) Requesting additional support from the Ministry of the Interior (MoI), Hamad argued to Al Bolani that many Iraqi Police (IP) units in SaD were undermanned and undersupplied and that an additional battalion was needed in the Ash Sharqat region north of Bayji. Al Bolani countered by stating that equipment could be provided, but not weapons. Perhaps trying to offer a gesture of goodwill, he also agreed to send extra policemen, saying that "if three hundred people are needed, we won't say no." Al Bolani emphasized the need for the IP to hire well educated, high-quality people, and when the Governor pointed out that IP were under-compensated, Al Bolani asked him to send a list of his best officers for year-end bonuses.

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Comment

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¶16. (C) Although the meetings between Salah ad Din's power players and key GOI officials will probably not produce an immediate bounty of tangible benefits, the Governor and Deputy Governor left Baghdad feeling as though a new line of communication had been opened. The value of these improved relationships will be tested in 2007 as a number of serious economic and security challenges for Salah ad Din are likely to arise. In a country where communication within a province, let alone across the entire country, is sporadic at best, new, mutually beneficial relationships between the GOI and local authorities in all provinces would be a significant positive development. END COMMENT.

¶17. (U) PRT Tikrit thanks the Embassy and MNF-I personnel for the support in making this last-minute trip a great success.

¶18. (U) For additional reporting from PRT Tikrit, Salah ad Din, please see our SIPRNET reporting blog:  
<http://www.intelink.sgov.gov/wiki/Tikrit>  
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